

# **NEWS RELEASE**

United States Department of Agriculture • Natural Resources Conservation Service  
3001 Coolidge Road, Suite 250 • East Lansing, Michigan 48823 • Phone (517)324-5270 • Web: [www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov)

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Local Farmer Earns National USDA Honor**

Lansing, MI- Barbara James Norman, a blueberry farmer from Covert, Michigan, was selected as the national "Small Farmer of the Year" for 2002 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The award, sponsored by the National Organization of Natural Resources Conservation Service Black Employees (NONRCSBE), is given to small scale farmers that are outstanding conservationists as well as community leaders. Ms. Norman traveled to Arlington, Texas to attend the annual meeting of the NONRCSBE where Michigan State Conservationist Ronald Williams presented her the award on December 4<sup>th</sup>.

Farming is a family tradition for Ms. Norman. The 53 acres of blueberries Ms. Norman now cultivates were handed down to her from her grandfather, Stanford Simmons. When Ms. Norman inherited her farm, the blueberries were not producing at optimum yield because of lack of resources and care for many years. With assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ms. Norman once again began actively managing the farm. Care and enhancement of the plants and soil through the use of conservation has returned the farm to a productive level.

Farming is only one of Ms. Norman's many activities. Formerly a school bus driver for Covert schools, Ms. Norman enjoys educating youth about conservation and careers in the sciences. She's held many meetings at her farm to introduce conservation and USDA programs to adults in the community as well. Ms. Norman serves as president of the Southern Michigan Farmer's Cooperative, an organization of small and minority farmers seeking to collectively enhance market opportunities for their produce. In addition to farming, Barbara works for the Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems, a non-profit organization which seeks to create and support more sustainable food and agriculture systems for producers and consumers in Michigan.

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"We are extremely pleased to recognize the contribution Ms. Norman has made and continues to make to conservation and to her community," stated State Conservationist Ronald Williams. "Ms. Norman is a shining example of how hard work, persistence and an appreciation for natural resources benefits not only an individual, but the community as a whole."

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